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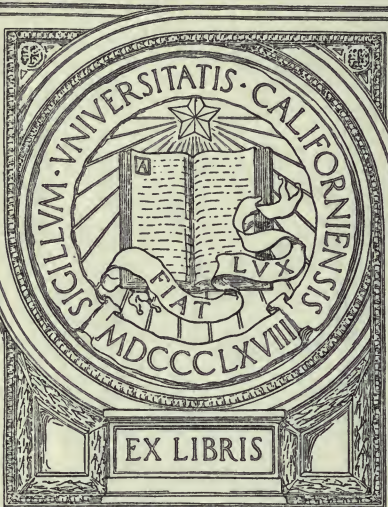
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THE
DRAMATIC UNITIES
OF
SHAKESPEARE:

IN
A LETTER ADDRESSED TO THE EDITOR OF BLACKWOOD'S
EDINBURGH MAGAZINE.

BY THE
REV. N. J. ^{Nicholas} HALPIN, A. B., M. R. I. A.

“ Ut pictura Poesis.”

DUBLIN:
HODGES AND SMITH, GRAFTON-STREET.
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TO THE EDITOR
OF
BLACKWOOD'S EDINBURGH MAGAZINE.

DUBLIN, *Nov. 12th*, 1849.

SIR,

UP to a late hour on the 10th of this month I was under the happy delusion that I was in possession of a secret, which, in due time, would secure to me the undisputed honour of the original and sole discoverer. But alas! for human expectations. Upon the 10th inst. I read, for the first time, in the Number of your Magazine for the current month, an article of great merit, entitled *Dies Boreales*, and therein, with no less surprise than disappointment, I found my secret, as I believe, anticipated, and the venerable Christopher North claiming to be the first and only discoverer of an *arcanum*, which he very properly announces, with all the weight of capital letters, to be "an ASTOUNDING DISCOVERY,"—a discovery "that will astound the whole world, and demand a NEW CRITICISM of the entire Shakespearian drama." This discovery is that of the *Laws of Unity*, by which Shakespeare modelled his drama; and I fully concur in the descriptive epithets he has applied to it.

“Astounding,”—not so much that such a code was invented and established by such an intellect as Shakespeare’s,—but “astounding,” inasmuch as, that it has *escaped detection* for the three centuries which have nearly elapsed since the great master-mind, which invented, put it into practice; a secret, certain to revolutionize the whole system of dramatic criticism by reason of its harmony with truth and nature, but never until now discovered. This, therefore, must needs be considered as the greatest and most important discovery in literature which modern times have produced. It can, therefore, be to *you* no wonder, if, with good and strong grounds, I should, at the earliest moment possible, put in my claim to be considered, if not *the* original and *only* discoverer of such a secret, *an* original and independent discoverer, at the least.

From so much of CHRISTOPHER NORTH’s development of those laws as he has published, I conceive his discovery to be identical with my own; or, if not corresponding at all points, so similar as to amount to the same thing:

. “Facies non omnibus una,
Nec diversa tamen, qualem decet esse sororum.”

I do not mean to question Christopher North’s claims to the honour of being *an* original discoverer of this “astounding” secret. I am quite sure that, whatever was competent to my mind was as accessible, if not more so, to his; and for the honour of the great poet, whom we both equally reverence, I rejoice that the truth of this theory receives, from the simultaneous discovery of two

independent and original inquirers, the accumulative evidence of a double discovery, on grounds and by processes nearly the same. All I mean to assert is, that I, too am an original discoverer of the same great secret, perfectly independent of any other; and that I know of no means by which *my* discovery could have been conveyed to *Christopher North*, nor *his* to me. I never heard of his, until the 10th of the present November (*Appendix A*). I have no acquaintance with the gentleman; I am not even certain of his name. I know of him only as Christopher North, the *sobriquet*, as it is commonly supposed, of the venerable Professor Wilson of Edinburgh. We both live in separate countries; we have no acquaintances or friends in common, that I am aware of; and I doubt that he has ever heard of the name or the existence of such a person as myself. There never was any communication between us, either personally or by letter, on this or any other subject; and though I have in confidence imparted my secret to many of my private friends, they are gentlemen on whose honour, prudence, and secresy I have the most implicit reliance.

Strange as it may be, then, the same important discovery (if his and mine should indeed turn out to be the same) has been made at or about the same time by two minds perfectly distinct from and independent of each other; and this affords another instance, to the many already on record, of the frequency with which great truths make themselves concurrently known to two or more original and independent inquirers at or about the same time.

The honour, then, of *an* original discoverer I now claim. I willingly concede to Christopher North, or the gentleman for whom this name stands *sobriquet*, the priority (by a few days) of laying his discovery before the world. But I claim for myself credit, that, within one day of my having read or heard of his publication, I came forward with old manuscript writings, and committed them to the press for immediate publication, as a sufficient and satisfactory proof that, long before the enunciation of Christopher North's discovery, I was in possession of the same or a similar discovery, the results of which I was at the time preparing, with such speed as a scanty leisure would permit me, to lay before the public. Now is the time for me to urge my claim—*now or never*.

Of this "astounding discovery," therefore, which is to "demand a NEW CRITICISM of the entire Shakespearian drama," I now proceed to give you a history of the origin and progress in my mind, up to the day on which the Number of your Magazine for the present month fell into my hands.

It is now nearly twenty years since (with unaffected blushes and sincere regret I say it) this important discovery made itself known to me during a perusal of the TWELFTH NIGHT. I caught it from a comparison of the times and dates assigned to the action of that drama; and comparing those again, with the similar phenomena of such of other Plays of Shakespeare, as readily presented themselves to my memory, I found the identity of system which (with very few and rare exceptions)

pervades and governs them all. I contented myself at the time with noting down on a loose slip of paper the remarkable fact ; and, placing this note among the leaves of the drama I had been reading, closed the volume, with the intention of giving the subject a closer and more accurate investigation at some future time of greater leisure. Being, however, at that period of my life, actively engaged in the duties of an extensive and laborious curacy in the diocese of Meath, I was never able to resume my research with the minuteness and accuracy requisite for the full and satisfactory assurance of the truth of my conjecture ; the thought, therefore, was laid aside for the time, and remained in abeyance ; until, after having removed my residence to Dublin, in the year 1835, the subject was again brought to my mind by the accident of the slight note already mentioned coming to my hands on a re-perusal of the same drama. I had now a better opportunity of examining the question ; for, disengaged reluctantly from clerical duties, I felt myself now at liberty for more secular studies ; and accordingly, from time to time, I prepared myself for the full development of my discovery before the public, by drawing up analyses of the several dramas of Shakespeare, especially of such of them as presented apparently the greatest difficulties to our recognition of a presiding art and law having governed the mind of the great poet in their composition.

But even now my progress was necessarily slow. My time was absorbed in literary pursuits of a different kind, and it was very seldom, and then at hours bor-

rowed from needful rest and exercise, that I could apply myself to this cherished object. Nevertheless I continued to accumulate the materials of a formal treatise, which I hoped at some time or other to complete; and with this view I drew up the analyses of very many of the most important of the plays; the manuscripts of which, in their original blotted state, I have placed in the hands of my publisher, as a sort of muniment of my claims to originality.

To several of my literary friends, in the meanwhile, I communicated, from time to time, the interesting discovery I had made, and, for the advantage of conversation and discussion of the subject with men of cultivated minds, imparted to them the essential principles, together with illustrative details of the novel theory. The earliest of those confidences was made to my friend and College class-fellow, J. Anster, Esq., LL. D., M. R. I. A., the distinguished translator of the FAUST. It is upwards of ten (say twelve) years, since he and I have been in the frequent habit of discussing the matter. But it is only fair to say that he never thought so highly of the value of my discovery as I did myself; and that to this moment I am doubtful to what extent—if at all—it meets his concurrence. (See *Appendix B.*)

At various subsequent times, in like manner, I made my conceptions known to Samuel Ferguson, Esq., M. R. I. A., Barrister at Law, who has never ceased in the interim to urge me to the execution of my design, lest the incidents of mortality, or the fortune of another discoverer, should anticipate my intent; (*Appendix C.*)

to George Petrie, Esq., LL. D., M. R. I. A., R. H. A., Author of the Inquiry into the Origin and Uses of the Round Towers in Ireland (*Appendix D*); and in the number of the literary friends I consulted from time to time, I may include Marmion Savage, Esq., A. M., M. R. I. A.; John Finlay, Esq., LL. D., M. R. I. A., Chairman of the County of Louth, and Author of a learned Treatise on the Law of Renewals, &c.; John Francis Waller, Esq., A. M., M. R. I. A., &c.; Henry Maunsell, Esq., M. D., F. R. C. S. I.; the Rev. Doctor Greham, Head Master of the Royal School of Enniskillen; my brother, C. Halpin, Esq., of Cavan, L. R. C. S. I., M. D., &c.; and other members of my own immediate family. From all these I could, if necessary, produce vouchers of the accuracy of my statement; but, conceiving such a cloud of witnesses quite superfluous, I content myself with giving, in the form of an Appendix, the testimony of a few.

Having thus, Sir, fortified my title to the honours of an *original* discoverer of the Shakspearian laws of unity, I now proceed to give you such a draft—such a rude outline—of the laws themselves, as, I trust, will, *to you especially*, be satisfactory proof that I am also an *independent* discoverer; and that I am no more indebted to C. N., directly or indirectly, for *my* theory, than he can be conscious of being indebted to me, or anybody else, for *his*. But, considering the circumstances under which I now write, the *peine forte et dure* of either *at once* vindicating my title, or for ever hereafter holding

my peace, my present exposition of the matter must needs be a very inadequate one; and I shall have to compress into a very narrow limit, and in a very hasty manner, the results of a long and laborious inquiry, to be re-collected from a multiplicity of blotted manuscripts, and which, for due and orderly development, would require much space and uninterrupted leisure.

I had often heard, with pain, Shakespeare denounced as a “barbarian” in letters, as one who knew not the laws of the art which he was practising, or, knowing, despised and rejected them; thus producing the noblest specimens of the drama which the world ever witnessed under no better guidance than that of caprice or *chance*!

I knew something of the (apparently) boundless powers of Shakespeare’s *intellect*, and its inexhaustible resources. I knew also of his vast *industry* as a dramatist and an actor; and of the signal PRUDENCE which enabled him, from comparative indigence, to amass in a few years a fortune that, measured by the value of our present money, would amount to nearly (if not more than) £2000 per annum.

I conceived that such a man was not likely to start upon his career of fame and fortune without guide, rule, or compass; and I concluded, therefore, that before he set himself down for life to an arduous professional pursuit, he had well considered all the premises, and carefully possessed himself of all the means requisite to insure success. I thence inferred that he was not a mere barbarian in letters, not so ignorant, or so regard-

less of dramatic law, as critics, French and English, have described him.

But I considered above all things that the first and great passion of a mighty and original Intellect is the *love of the BEAUTIFUL*; that without symmetry there is no beauty; without order, no symmetry; and no order, without law. That which is the offspring of law cannot be the result of either chance or caprice; and knowing that Shakespeare had *designedly* produced a lengthened series of works of the most consummate beauty, I felt instinctively that they were, and must have been, the issues of an intellect in which the principles of law, order, symmetry, and beauty, were predominant qualities.

Those qualities Shakespeare possessed in the highest degree, either by nature or acquirement. If by nature, he became, like Homer and the other great originals, a law unto himself. If by acquirement, he learned his rules from existing models.

Of such models there were two before him: the *ENGLISH*, as practised by his contemporaries, Lylie, Greene, Peele, Lodge, and Marlow; and the *GRECIAN*, as practised by the ancients—Æschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, &c.

The old English dramatic muse was truly barbarian. Unrestrained by laws, she ran riot into the wildest extravagance of time, place, and fable. The *fable* might include as many extraneous side-plots as were requisite to round out a five, six, or seven act play. *Place* ranged freely through the continents of the old world. The *Battle*

of *Alcazar* (ascribed to Peele) travels visibly from Europe to Africa and back again; and Marlow's *Tamerlane* is still more ambitiously locomotive, adding Asia also to his territorial rambles: and *time* was stretched almost to the crack of doom. The action of Lylie's *Endymion*, for instance, extends through forty mortal years, half of the term spent on the journey of Eumenides to Thessaly, and the remainder on his return to Cynthia's Court. The time of Doctor Faustus, the masterpiece of Marlow, is formally measured into four-and-twenty years, the gaps and interstices of which remain open, unconcealed, and unguarded; the whole course of incidents forming the most inartificial, straightforward, and discontinuous series of adventures that can be imagined as the offspring of Chaos. Their imitations of nature resembled a Chinese landscape, *all foreground*. There is no doubt but that Shakespeare must have known this disorganized and disorderly congeries of undramatic effects. Is it any wonder that he utterly rejected it?

The Grecian drama came next under our poet's review. If he must be presumed not scholar enough to read it in the original Greek,* yet he could not have failed to be acquainted with its structure through the medium of translations, however unskilfully made, or

* The critics should not be too sure of this. There is in my possession evidence of the most authentic kind, quite sufficient to satisfy me that of one (or perhaps more) of the English Universities, as then existing, William Shakespeare was a student. Is not this an "astounding discovery," which kept itself *perdue* from the critics until the middle of the nineteenth century?

through the excellent disquisition on its laws by Sir Philip Sidney, in his *Defence of Poesie*, a work deservedly popular in its day. The captious rivalry, moreover, of Ben Jonson, who piqued himself on his complete mastery in the Greek school, would irresistibly challenge our poet's attention to those boasted unities. They form in themselves a very beautiful and artistic code, too well and generally known to require description here; but, in the articles of time and place,—at least as interpreted to us by the critics,—far too arbitrary and narrow for the full display of character, or for the natural or even probable development of a great and noble action in its just proportions; an inconvenience so oppressive to the genius of the poets, that they did not scruple boldly to violate the law of *place*; and of the restrictions of *time* they disembarrassed themselves by dividing the action of their subject into separate parts,—three, or perhaps more,—and hence their system of TRILOGIES, or three separate dramas, consisting of so many different stages or periods of the main action,—all successively exhibited at the same theatre and on the same day.

It is not likely that, with all the regularity of this code, and all the authority in its favour, an intellect of such grasp and power as Shakespeare's would have rested content with its trammels. That he knew it well is plain from his frequent allusions to it, and his apologies for the non-observance of its rules in his performances; that he could practise it, had he chosen, the *Comedy of Errors* and the *Tempest* afford

conclusive proof. But that he purposely rejected it as it stood, or modified it into something much better, something more natural and more consonant with our experience of the on-goings of actual life, is manifest from the *choruses* interposed between the Acts of his Henry the Fifth, in which he, at once, acknowledges the necessity of a law, and lays down with more or less precision the new code of unities upon which his own drama was constructed. These *choruses* form a canon of criticism, with which no person who desires to understand the drama of Shakespeare should be unacquainted.

Let us now consider his code, and the manner in which he has obeyed it throughout the whole range of his dramatic works.

1. UNITY OF SUBJECT OR FABLE is an essential quality in any work of Art, in every department of the Arts. Whether in a ballad or a history, whether in statuary or architecture, in painting or music, unity of design is so absolute a necessity, that its absence or infringement mars the beauty and excellence of the production, whatever it may be. In this respect Shakespeare is perfectly regular. Through all his pieces this unity of fable prevails; and wherever it appears to be infringed, it will be found, on the slightest examination, that the several parts constitute a whole of which each part is the *sine quâ non* of the rest. Thus the Merchant of Venice is supposed by the critics to be constructed of two fables, very artfully united, viz., the fortunes of Bassanio and Portia, and the misfortunes of Antonio and Shylock. But the fable is absolutely one and the same. The borrowing of the

money on a bond is the *sine quâ non* of the marriage between Bassanio and the wealthy heiress; and this marriage again, the *sine quâ non* of Antonio's deliverance from death and the confiscation of Shylock's property. Even the elopement of Jessica with a Christian husband, and laden with Jewish wealth, is a circumstance essential to the barbarity of Shylock's pursuit of vengeance. There is in no one drama of Shakespeare an instance in which the bonds of unity are less stringent than the *sine quâ non* condition.

II. THE UNITY OF PLACE is a condition which the Greek lawgivers themselves did not think worthy of a rigid observance. Thus Euripides, in *The Suppliants*, during the transit of a single ode, marches an army from Athens to Thebes, where the battle is fought, and whence the general returns victorious; and in the *Trachinians* of Sophocles, the voyage from Thessaly to Eubœa is thrice accomplished in the course of the piece. Nor was Terence more straight-laced than his masters. The action of his *Heautontimorumenos* commences in a city, migrates for a space to the country, and thence it returns to town. Place, or, rather, the *distance* between two places (~~for with nothing more is dramatic action concerned~~), is treated by Shakespeare simply as *an element of time*; that is to say, the time necessarily occupied in measuring the interval, whether on foot or by any sort of vehicle. Time and place, in Shakespeare's system, are

“ a just equinox,
The one as long as the other.”

1. an indispensable thing as condition

His distances, therefore, never exceed "twenty miles"* by land, or the "narrow seas"† by water; and whenever he wants the advantage of an indefinite idea of *time* and *distance*, he *systematically* sends one party by sea and another by land to the same place. Thus, in the Merchant of Venice, Bassanio goes first from Venice to Belmont by water, and Jessica and Lorenzo by land. In the Two Gentlemen of Verona, Valentine and Protheus travel by *sea* from Verona to Milan, and Julia by land; the poet's object being, first, to create an indefinite idea of the distance between the two places, and next, to check off the difference by means of the several modes of traversing the interval in a given time.

And this is the invariable practice of Shakespeare.

It is, however, in his treatment of the unity of *Time* as a dramatic element that Shakespeare has (I believe) *invented*, but (most certainly) carried into execution, a species of unity more true, natural, and comprehensive, and not less artistic and symmetrical, than that of the ancients, and which far surpasses in its illusive powers "all Greek, all Roman art." The narrow limits which Aristotle has graciously *extended* to a single revolution

* I know but of one exception, and that is where the Prince says :

"Go, Poins, to horse to, horse ; for thou and I
Have thirty miles to ride ere dinner time."

1 HENRY IV., ACT III. SC. 3.

† This expression, which was the ordinary name of the *Straits* between Dover and Calais, invariably suggests to the English mind a voyage which may be made in a *couple of hours*, with a favourable wind, or even in less time, with such gales as the poet can supply at will.

of the sun, that is to say, to four-and-twenty hours, are by far too cabined and confined, either for the complete evolution of a noble and comprehensive action, or for the full and satisfactory development of the human character. With respect to the *action*, it must needs be compassed within an *arbitrary* limit of from three to four-and-twenty hours, partly visible to the spectator,—a limit too short for any great transaction,—and partly audible, through the dull, cold, and uninteresting narrative of the Nuncius. With reference to *character*, we can know but that brief phase of it which displays itself in the sudden and short transit of a single day, and in a single passion. It requires, in our actual experience of the world, weeks or months to become acquainted with the whole man, his passions, and his temperament, ere we can be probably assured that his character and conduct upon any given occasion is in harmony with what we know of him in his general, ordinary, and habitual developments. In these respects it must be acknowledged that Shakespeare's system has infinitely the advantage of the Grecian. Of the Medea of Euripides we know no more than the single phase in which we behold her in the play called by her name. With the Hamlet of Shakespeare we have, as it were, a life-long acquaintance : we know, in the single transaction before us, the accordance of his present behaviour with the tenor of his general conduct.

But how is this *long* acquaintance to be reconciled with the confessedly *brief* period in which it has actually been acquired ? Dramatic time is a very different

thing from natural time. While natural time has no limit but that of experience, dramatic time has limits which the dramatist cannot pass without merging into barbarity. But there is a *natural* law limiting the time of the drama; and if we ask ourselves what is the drama, the answer will help us to ascertain the natural limit, and to distinguish it from the arbitrary.

The *Drama*, then is THE IMITATION, BY GESTURE, AND IN DIALOGUE, OF AN ACTION WHICH THE SPECTATOR IS PRIVILEGED TO WITNESS WITH UNBROKEN (or sleepless) ATTENTION, AT A SINGLE SITTING OR "WATCH."

Its limit, therefore, as to time, corresponds with the period, more or less extended, during which a spectator may be supposed to be a sleepless witness of a transaction sufficiently interesting and important to engage his attention throughout that *watch*. But, measured into days or hours, what the length of that *watch* may be is a matter of some doubt. Shakespeare's own idea of a man's capability of watchfulness may be collected from what Iago says of Cassio:

" And do but see his vice;
'Tis to his virtue a just equinox,
The one as long as the other ; . . .
He'll watch the horologe a *double set*,
If drink rock not his cradle.'

OTHELLO, ACT II. Sc. 3.

Four-and-twenty hours, say the commentators; but as the Italian horologe numbers upon its dial-plate twenty-four hours, a "double set" or round, i. e., forty-eight hours, is the true time meant. "I feel it unpleasant to appeal to my own experience; but, having no

other voucher at hand, I am constrained to do it.”* On many occasions I have involuntarily outwatched the Florentine ; and, upon one occasion at least, by twelve or fourteen hours. In my “salad days” of undergraduatecy, Sir Walter Scott’s enchanting novel of *Waverley* fell into my hands ; and being bound to return the volumes very quickly, and being much occupied by business during the day, I sat up during two successive summer nights at its perusal ; nor did I feel any desire or necessity for sleep, until the usual bed-time on the third night ; an interval of no unpleasant watchfulness of six-and-fifty hours at the least, voluntarily endured. I need not add that, so occupied, I scarcely knew how time passed. Supposing then that every one could do what Shakespeare has suggested, or I have done myself, I would assume a natural limit to the watch,—say *forty-eight* or *fifty-six* consecutive hours ; and I affirm that within that period the action of the Shakespearian drama is—*almost* universally—comprehended, and *generally* very much within that term. Now any other limitation, such as three, six, twelve, or twenty-four hours, is an arbitrary and unnatural law ; improbable, and needless where the true law so obviously reveals itself ; and in this respect, I say, Shakespeare’s law transcends the law of the Greeks and Romans, and altogether eclipses the lights of the French school.

By this limitation, transactions which, according to our experience in life, would *naturally* occupy weeks or months, nay years, are *dramatically* drawn within the compass of a few consecutive hours ; just as the almost

* Cowper’s Preface to his Translation of Homer.

interminable views of the landscape are represented, in all verisimilitude, on the uniform plane surface of a few feet of canvass. Indeed Shakespeare appears to have done for *time* what the painter has done for *space*,—thrown it into PERSPECTIVE, and given to the *remote* and to the *near* its proper and distinctive place, colouring, and character, as each exists in the natural world. The one, upon the upright, plane, and (except colouring) unvaried surface of a small sheet of canvass, presents to the spectator's eye a landscape embracing space from its nearest *foreground* through all the varieties of hill and valley until the distances melt into the imperceptible line where the green earth or the blue sea melts into the undistinguishable *horizon*; the other, within the undisturbed loophole of a single *watch*, gathers up the passages and events of a transaction, from its remotest manifestations down to its perfect and present consummation. The arts of both are of a homogeneous nature, and may be at once characterized and distinguished by the analogous names of the PERSPECTIVE OF SPACE and THE PERSPECTIVE OF TIME. The painter produces *his* effects by means of lights and shades, by the force of his foreground colouring, by atmospheric effects, and the gradual feebleness of his back-ground or distant tints. The poet produces his, by a *series* of dates skilfully graduated through a course of events, from that which is actually visible and palpable to the *eyes*, to those transmitted only to the *ears*, or suggested to the spectator's *imagination*, through a hundred different channels, until the impression left upon his mind is an impression composed of the visible and the audible, the natural and

the dramatic, the real and the illusory. Shakespeare knew at least as well as Horace that

“*Segnius irritant animum demissa per aures,
Quam quæ sunt oculis subjecta fidelibus.*”

Upon this well-known principle he contrived what one may term a *chronometer* consisting of a double series of time or dates; the one illusory, suggestive, and *natural*; the other artistical, visible, and *dramatic*; the first of which may be called the PROTRACTIVE series, the latter, the ACCELERATING: and out of the impressions, thus unequally created, he constructed a dramatic system unknown to the world before his time, and unpractised ever since. He was the first discoverer, and, as far as my observation goes, the last practitioner of an art which realizes in its full sense the canon of the Roman critic—

“UT PICTURA POESIS.”

I do not conceive it to have been the poet's desire to impress the spectator or the reader of his works with a rigid belief in the *extremes* of either series of his dates; to insinuate that the *accelerating* gave the *only true*, or the *protractive* the ALTOGETHER FALSE idea of the time of his action. On the contrary, I maintain that, by means of this double series of dates,—of his “two clocks” (according to the happy illustration of Christopher North),—he meant to produce an *illusory* effect on the mind (such as people actually experience in the theatre), disabling it from ascertaining the *genuine* duration of the action, and only permitting it to form, out of the elements of both series, such a dim, hazy, and indistinct conception as may, nay must, arise from the involution of measures of time so artfully intermingled.

The obvious intent of this illusory process is to lead the imagination to conceive, that within the compass of a narrow but uninterrupted *watch*, it may have witnessed an entire transaction, more or less extended, from beginning to end—the present and the past, throughout all the intermediate gradations of old Father “Time with his pentarchy of tenses;” in some such way as the observer beholds in a painted landscape the whole space enclosed within the visible horizon, with all its hills and valleys, woods and rivers, from the foreground close at hand, to the dim spire or the shadowy mountain, distant many, many miles, although every point of the plane, upright surface before us is equally distant from the observer’s eye.

“Time and the hour” does not permit me, under the peculiar circumstances which call forth this letter, to develope the various subtle and truly artistic devices by which the poet carries into operation the complicate machinery of such a system. It must suffice for the present to say, that I am ready at any time, when called upon, or as due leisure shall be allowed me, to give to the public what I hope will prove a satisfactory account of them. Meanwhile, in illustration of what I have said, I must submit to you an analysis of one of Shakespeare’s dramas, which, for the purpose of putting my friend Dr. Anster in full possession of my views, I drew up, in the form of a letter to him, early in the spring of the present year,—in February, perhaps; but certainly not later than April. I had not finished it, when indifferent health, and a pressure of business on my leisure, interrupted my progress; and it has lain in my desk, a

fragment, until the 10th inst., when I first met the discovery of Christopher North, in Blackwood's Magazine. I now publish this fragment in the exact state in which I left it: thinking it better to go before the public with all my imperfections on my head, than to bring the authenticity of my MS. into question by any alterations or additions. Such, as I originally wrote it (the occasional blottings and erasures which are incident to first sketches always excepted), you have the following

TIME-ANALYSIS OF THE MERCHANT OF VENICE.

“You wish to have an outline of my theory respecting Shakespeare's management of time as a dramatic element. It would require an essay of greater length than I have now leisure for, to put you in possession of the whole subject; but probably an illustration of his system, by the analysis of a drama, apparently the most irregular in this respect, will enable you to trace the process for yourself, and, if not satisfy—convince you, at least, that there is something more than mere fancy at the root of my conviction.

“Of the Merchant of Venice the received opinion is, that the time of the dramatic action, including the term of the bond, extends to somewhat more than three months. This I conceive to be an illusion contrived by means of a double series of dates, one which protracts, the other which accelerates the action; and that, in virtue of the latter, the dramatic time of the play is comprised within thirty-nine consecutive hours.

“The transaction naturally divides itself into *two distinct periods*,—with *the interval between them*.

“1. The first period ranges from the opening of the action and the borrowing of Shylock’s money, to the embarkation of Bassanio and his suite for Belmont:

“2. The second includes the time between Bassanio’s arrival at Belmont and his return to it, accompanied by Antonio, after the trial:

“3. And the *interval* between those two periods is *concurrent with the time of the bond*, whatever that may be.

“Let us now examine *each period* of visible action by the dates exactly laid down in the text; and then fix the *interval* by the same rule.

“ACCELERATING SERIES.

“I. The action then commences with Bassanio’s solicitation of the loan of three thousand ducats, and Antonio’s direction to his friend to ‘go presently inquire where money is to be had’ (Act I. Sc. 2). Bassanio goes on his mission forthwith; meets with Shylock, agrees upon the terms, and invites him to dinner. The Jew consents to lend the money, but declines to ‘smell pork’ with the Christian, and he leaves the scene, directing the borrower to ‘meet him forthwith at the notary’s;’ meanwhile he will

. ‘go and purse the ducats straight;
See to his house, left in the fearful guard
Of an unthrifty knave; and presently
He will be with them [Bassanio and his friend].’

ACT I. Sc. 2.

“As the invitation to dinner implies the time at which this part of the transaction takes place; and as the dinner hour in Shakespeare’s day was twelve o’clock, the time at which the action of the play commences is clearly indicated at a little before noon on the first day, say at eleven o’clock in the forenoon. The first Act, therefore, cannot occupy more than a single hour.

“The second Act, Sc. 2, shows us Bassanio, having touched the ducats, making rapid preparations for his journey, giving to Lorenzo directions to stow his purchases orderly, and hasten his return:

‘Return in haste, for I do feast to-night
My best-esteemed acquaintance: hie thee, go.’

“The supper hour, we also learn in the same scene, is fixed for *five o’clock* in the afternoon of the same day. ‘Let it be so hasted,’ says Bassanio, ‘that supper be ready at the farthest by *five* of the clock.’ At nine the supper party breaks up, and Bassanio embarks for Belmont. Thus,—

‘ANTONIO. Fye, fye, Gratiano! where are all the rest?
 the wind is come about;
 Bassanio presently will go aboard.’

ACT II. SC. 6.

And thus the time occupied by the transaction of the first period is exactly limited to ten consecutive hours, viz.:

	HOURS.
From the opening of the action to dinner time,	1
From dinner time (12 o'clock) to supper (5 o'clock),	5
From supper (5 o'clock) to the embarkation (9 o'clock),	4
	<hr/>
First period,	10

“II. The second period of action *begins* with Bassanio's arrival at Belmont, and *ends* with his return to it, in company with Antonio, after the trial.

“His *arrival at Belmont* is announced in the last scene of the *second* Act, thus:

‘SERVANT. Madam, there is alighted at your gate
A young Venetian, &c.

NERISSA.—Bassanio, lord love, if thy will it be!’

And with those words ends the second Act.

“The second scene of Act the *Third* presents Bassanio to Portia (not indeed a new acquaintance, nor now for the first time; for she had met (see Act I. Sc. 2) at her father's house, ‘the Venetian, the scholar, and the soldier that had come thither in company of the Marquis of Montferrat,—whose name was Bassanio’); but in this scene Bassanio has his first interview, in the capacity of a suitor, with Portia; and the dialogue shows there has been *no* delay between the announcement of his arrival and his waiting upon the lady. She prays him to pause, to tarry,—but he is too impatient to let

a moment interpose between his arrival and the decision of his fortune :

‘ PORTIA. I pray you, *tarry* ; *pause a day or two*,
Before you hazard

BASSANIO. Let me choose,
For, as I am, I live upon the rack.
. . . . let me to my fortune and the caskets:’

ACT III. Sc. 2.

and, forthwith proceeding to his election, he wins the inestimable prize.

“ Scarcely, however, has he done so, than the melancholy tidings reach him of the bankruptcy and peril of Antonio; and, under the directions of Portia, he

‘ First, goes with her to church, and calls her wife ;’
Ibid.

and forthwith

‘ Leaves her on her wedding day,’
Ibid.

under the positive engagement, however, that he *will not sleep till his return*.

‘ BASSANIO.—No bed shall e’er be guilty of my stay ;
No rest be interposer ’twixt us twain.’

Ibid.

“ Considering the very early hours which our forefathers, from the highest rank to the lowest, were used to keep in Shakespeare’s time, it is not too early to assign this scene and the departure of Bassanio for Venice to about eight o’clock in the morning.

“ Portia has made up her mind at once to follow him, nay, even to be home again ‘ *before her husband*,’ though she knows how speedily he has bound himself to return.

This resolve is put into execution (Act III. Sc. 4), after she has made short preparation for her toilet, given the charge of her household to Lorenzo, and despatched a letter to the Doctor Bellario at Padua, with directions to her messenger to meet her with the Doctor's answer at the *Tranect* with all expedition.

‘PORTIA. waste no time in words,
But get thee gone; I shall be there before thee.’

ACT III. Sc. 2.

“ This *Tranect* was the water-passage or ferry between the islands on which Venice was built and the mainland on which Belmont stood; and, therefore, was in the direct line between her residence and the city to which she was going. The distance between the two points is clearly indicated by her speech to Nerissa, urging her to speed :

‘ But come, I'll tell thee all my whole device
When I am in my coach, which stays for us
At the park gate; and therefore haste away,
For *we must measure twenty miles* to-day.’

Ibid.

“ Interpreted by the meaning of Bassanio's vow to return *without sleeping*, and Portia's resolution to be back again at Belmont *before him*, these *twenty miles* must include the *whole day's journey* which the lady had to make: that is, *ten miles* to Venice, and *ten* more returning. Venice, then, is but TEN MILES from Belmont, and the distance might be easily traversed, with a pair of horses to her coach, in a couple of hours. Taking, then, *eight o'clock*, A. M., for the time of the casket scene, and allotting *four hours* for the marriage cere-

mony, the preparations for the journey, and the journey itself, Portia may have arrived at Venice by *noon*, and taken her place in court after the trial had been begun. But a very short time elapses at the trial scene (only the time of representation), when she again sets out on her return to Belmont, without even waiting for dinner; thus:

‘DUKE. Sir, I entreat you with me home to dinner.

PORTIA. I humbly do desire your grace of pardon.

I must away *this night* toward Padua,

And it is meet *I presently set forth.*’

ACT IV. Sc. 1.

“Again, she refuses an invitation from Bassanio, with ‘that cannot be;’ and having made no delay further than drawing up the deed which Shylock is to sign, and transmitting it to him, she sets out homeward-bound.

‘PORTIA. We’ll away *to-night*,

And be *a day before* our husbands home.’

ACT IV. Sc. 1.

“Bassanio delays some while longer.

. . . . ‘In the *morning early* will we both

Fly toward Belmont,’

ACT IV. Sc. 1,

quoth he to Antonio; and in the Fifth Act (which consists but of a single scene), we find him arriving in the garden there, some short time after his lady.

“The Fifth Act opens by moonlight.

‘LORENZO.—How sweet the moon-light sleeps upon this bank!’

“A courier enters and announces that

‘His mistress will *before the break of day*

Be here at Belmont.’

“ And she herself, having, to dally with the time,

. ‘ strayed about,
By holy crosses, where she knelt and prayed
For happy wedlock hours,’

shortly afterwards makes her appearance, while still the lamplight in her hall is distinctly visible,—

(‘ The light we see is burning in my hall’),—

as she enters at a distance; so that it is still but dusky morn when she has finished her journey; and it is ‘ *day*,’

(‘ Such as the day is when the sun is hid’),

when Bassanio, entering, fulfils his promise that betwixt his departure and return

‘ No bed should e’er be guilty of his stay,
No rest be interposer ’twixt them twain.’

“ Now, that the whole transaction took place in summer, is evident from finding the household of Portia enjoying the beauties of the gardens of Belmont throughout a moonlight night; and considering the shortness of the Italian summer night, and that it is yet but faint and dusky dawn when the whole party re-assemble in the garden, we cannot place the final close of the dramatic action at a later hour than about *two o’clock* of the morning after the trial: that is to say, the second portion of the visible action cannot have occupied more time than between eight o’clock, A. M., of one day, and two o’clock in the forenoon of the succeeding, that is to say, *eighteen consecutive hours*.

“ Here, then, we have two distinct periods of time,

every hour of which is ascertained and plainly accounted for; the first beginning with the loan, and ending with Bassanio's embarkation for Belmont; the second commencing with his arrival there, and terminating with the close of the drama. In the INTERVAL, whatever that be, comes the expiration of the bond. What is that INTERVAL? The received opinion takes it to be *three months*. Thus:

‘SHYLOCK.—Three thousand ducats,—well!

BASSANIO.—Aye, sir, for *three months*.’

ACT I. SC. 3.

“It is my conviction, on the contrary,—a conviction which I can justify to demonstration by the text,—that the interval is really but *a single night*; that night, to wit, which intervenes between Bassanio's embarkation and his arrival at Belmont,—that night, in fact, which elapses between Jessica's flight with Lorenzo and her father's fresh and bitter objurgations on the following morning; and that, consequently, the received period of the bond is an *illusory* period. Let us observe the progress of events.

“It was agreed upon that the fair fugitive and her lover (Jessica and Lorenzo) should take parts in a mask to be given at Bassanio's supper, and thence elope in the same ship with him. The mask, however, is suddenly put off by a favourable change of the wind, and Bassanio embarks and sets sail without them. But though—through some delay on their part—not on board his vessel, the Jewess and her lover set out upon their flight very shortly afterwards *in a gondola*. She is

missed by her father immediately on his return from Bassanio's supper ; his suspicions naturally fall upon Bassanio, in whose friendship Lorenzo was known to hold a high place; the hue and cry is raised, and the following is a narrative of the events connected with this episode:

'SALARINO. Why man, I saw Bassanio under sail;
With him is Gratiano gone along;
And in their ship, *I am sure, Lorenzo is not.*

SALANIO. The villain Jew with outcries rais'd the Duke;
Who went with him to search Bassanio's ship.

SALARINO. He came too late, the ship was under sail:
But there the duke was given to understand,
That in a gondola were seen together
Lorenzo and his amorous Jessica.
Besides, Antonio certified the duke,
They were not with Bassanio in his ship.'

ACT II. Sc. 8.

"The fact, not very important in itself, is thus strongly impressed upon the mind of the audience, in order to fix with precision the time and manner of Jessica's elopement, and to show that it took place on the same night, and almost at the same moment, as Bassanio's embarkation, viz., at nine o'clock in the evening of the first day's action.

"Thus, in the eighth scene of the *second* Act we find Shylock in his first agonies of rage at his daughter's flight, 'so strange, outrageous, and so variable,' that

'All the boys in Venice follow him,
Crying,—his stones, his daughter, and his ducats:'

and, in the first scene of the *ensuing* Act we find him in the same continued and unabated state of excitement

and frenzy, charging Salarino and Salanio with being accessories and accomplices to the flight and robbery. 'You knew,' says he, addressing those gentlemen, 'you knew, none so well, none so well as you, of my daughter's flight:' and their provoking and sarcastic answer is: 'That's certain; I, for my part, know the tailor that made the wings she flew withal.' They then continue to banter him and aggravate his temper, and, as this is obviously a continuation of Shylock's first intemperate rage, and the first interview, since the elopement, between him and his comfortable neighbours, whom (suspecting their knowledge of the facts) he would naturally soon seek out to obtain information, it cannot, by any stretch of fancy, be supposed to have taken place later than the *first day* (or rather morning) *after the event*, with the interval only of the intervening night. This scene then, be it remembered, is the first in the *third Act*; and we have seen at the close of the *preceding Act* (II. 9), that Bassanio had *in the meanwhile* arrived at Belmont. Thus the incident of Jessica's elopement *overlaps at both ends* the coincident journey of Bassanio; and whilst it proves that the time occupied by both is as nearly as possible the same (Jessica and Lorenzo arriving at Belmont during Bassanio's first interview with Portia), demonstrates that time to have been nothing longer than *the single night* which intervenes between Shylock's immediate search for his daughter, and his unabated fury and resentment on the following morning. Measuring then this incident in hours, from nine o'clock P. M. of the first day's action,

to eight o'clock A. M. of the second day, during which the bond expires, or becomes forfeit, the interval is *eleven hours*.

“ This view is confirmed by another consideration: the ascertained distance between Belmont and Venice.

“ We have already seen that the distance between the two points is but *ten miles*. What then was Bassanio about for the *three months* supposed to have elapsed between the signing of the bond and its forfeiture? Was he cruising about the Gulf of Venice?—or did his passage of the *Tranect* occupy all that time? Lorenzo and Jessica, who left Venice by a gondola about the same time that he did, arrived by land from thence nearly as soon as himself; and Salerio, who must have left Venice *on the day after them*, performs the same feat. Did they, likewise, spend three months upon the journey which Portia could traverse in her coach *twice* within *twenty* hours? In short, did Bassanio waste ninety-one days upon a voyage by sea, when he might, as he subsequently did in company with Antonio, have reached his destination in a couple of hours? * Certainly not. There is, therefore, some strong illusion as to the period of the

(a) “ ‘ A couple of hours.’ Thus Bassanio, after the trial, proceeding towards Antonio’s house, he says to him :

‘ In the morning early will we both
Fly toward Belmont.’

ACT IV. Sc. 1 (at the end).

“ The ‘ earliest in the *morning*’ at which they could have departed would be after twelve o’clock at night. But we find them both arriving at Portia’s dwelling in the dusk of a summer’s dawning, say

bond; and, if we observe the proofs, we must admit the contrivance to be profoundly artistical.

“PROTRACTIVE SERIES.

“The bond upon which *ostensibly* the money is lent is a bond for ‘three thousand ducats at three months;’ that upon which it is *really* advanced is a bond substituted for the former, through the affected good nature and kindness of Shylock. The first was, of course, the ordinary mercantile bond of the country, bearing the usual interest, payable at a certain specified date, and, doubtless, subject to the usual penalty of double the amount on forfeiture. Of the second we know little or nothing beyond the penalty on forfeiture—‘a pound of flesh,’ &c. It is ‘a merry bond,’ drawn, signed, and sealed in ‘a merry sport.’ It bears no interest, indeed, but we are left in ignorance of the sum really advanced, or of the time and place when and where it should become payable. The Jew’s own description of the instrument is in the following very ambiguous terms:

‘Go with me to a notary: seal me there
Your *single* bond; and, in a merry sport,
If you repay me not on *such a day*,

at two o’clock, A. M. ‘This night,’ says Portia, just as the friends are about to enter,—

‘This night, methinks, is but the day-light sick;
It looks a little paler; ’tis a day
Such as the day is when the sun is hid.’

ACT V. SC. 1.

In *such a place, such sum, or sums*, as are
Express'd in the condition, *let the forfeit*
Be nominated for an equal pound
Of your fair flesh,' &c.

ACT I. SC. 3.

“To lure the merchant more effectually into his snare, the Jew represents this proffer as an act of disinterested kindness:

‘I would be friends with you, and have your love;
Forget the shames that you have stain'd me with;
Supply your present wants, and take no doit
Of usance for my moneys, and you'll not hear me:
This is kind I offer.’

Ibid.

And further, to disarm them of all suspicion, he sneers at the absurdity of their supposing that, in any case, he would think of exacting the forfeiture. ‘Pray you,’ quoth he,

. ‘Pray you, tell me this;
If he should break his day, what should I gain
By the exaction of the forfeiture?
A pound of man's flesh, taken from a man,
Is not so estimable, profitable neither,
As flesh of muttons, beefs, or goats. I say,
To buy his favour I extend this friendship;
If he will take it, so; if not, adieu;
And, for my love, I pray you, wrong me not.’

Ibid.

“A penalty like this was not, with due time for preparation, likely to be incurred; still less, under such professions, to be enforced. The terms are agreed to, and Shylock proceeds alone to give the notary ‘directions

for this merry bond.' Antonio, in his reliance on the Jew's reasoning and assurances, signs and seals the instrument, perhaps without examination; and the deed being legally drawn up, and the penalty not unprecedented, he must abide the consequences of his own rash act.*

"Correct, however, in its technical forms, as this 'merry bond' may have been, we yet know that in some respect it was *fraudulent* in its substance; for, at the trial, Shylock is charged with having

' *Indirectly* and *directly* too
Contrived against the very life
Of the defendant.'

ACT IV. SC. 1.

'*Directly*,' by proceeding with knife, scales, and weights, to exact the fatal forfeiture; and '*indirectly*,' no doubt by some *fraudulent* contrivance in the deed. What could this fraud have been? Comparing the date of the execution of the bond with the date of its expiring, we are led to the irresistible conclusion, that the fraud lay either in the omission of any date or period at all, or the substitution of a false one; and, in the latter case, we must suppose it was payable, according to a very usual practice among merchants, *at sight*, or *on demand*. This

* "He has been warned of the danger; but persists.

'BASSANIO. You shall not seal to such a bond for me.

ANTONIO. Why, fear not, man; I will not forfeit it.'

"And again:

'Yes, Shylock, I will seal unto this bond.'

ACT I. SC. 3."

view entirely reconciles the apparent discrepancy between the actual time of Bassanio's journey to Belmont, and the time of the bond's arrival at maturity; and Shakespeare has taken care to account for the relentless rapidity with which Shylock takes savage advantage of his fraud. For no other purpose does he introduce the otherwise extraneous episode of Jessica's elopement with Lorenzo, in company, as it was thought, with Antonio's friend, and laden with her father's diamonds and ducats, than to exasperate the Jew's hatred of the Christian merchant, and to precipitate his revenge. Whilst yet raging for his daughter's flight, he has heard of Antonio's (supposed) 'loss by sea;' he hears, also, from Tubal, of 'divers of Antonio's creditors coming to Venice, that swear he cannot choose but break;' and knowing, by the recent transaction between them, that the merchant had neither 'money nor commodity to raise a *present* sum,' he rushes forthwith to demand payment, exclaiming, as he goes, 'I will have the heart of him if he forfeit.' Antonio is unprepared for such a sudden and unexpected demand. The bond is dishonoured; the penalty is incurred. The Jew proceeds to his revenge; and for this characteristic trait we are prepared by the foreboding words of Antonio:

'If thou wilt lend this money, lend it not
As to thy friends; (for when did friendship take
A breed of barren metal of his friend?)
But lend it rather to thine *enemy* ;
Who, if he break, *thou may'st with better face,*
Exact the penalties.'

“Now, it is to be observed that Shylock had lent the money ‘as to a *friend* ;’ but the real or affected exasperation of his daughter’s elopement enables him to ‘exact the penalty with better face,’ and he loses not a moment to resume his enmity.

“On no other grounds, indeed, can the bankruptcy—if such it must be called—of Antonio, be reconciled with the fact of his absolute solvency. He was as wealthy at the time of his forfeiture and trial as he was either when he contracted the debt, or as afterwards, when he learns at Belmont that his

‘Argosies

Are richly come to harbour *suddenly*,’

ACT V. SC. 1,

that is, *before they were expected*. And yet, supposing, as he did at first, that the bond had three months to run, they were expected ‘within two months,’ or, as he adds,—

..... ‘*a month before*

This bond expires, I do expect return

Of *thrice three times* the value of this bond.’

ACT I. SC. 3.

“The argosies, then, did arrive, laden with treasure, a very long time, indeed, *before a bond for three months could have run its course* ; how, then, could Antonio have forfeited the penalty if the actual bond had the supposed time to run out ? No: the fact is, Antonio was never really a bankrupt at all. He was, indeed, at the opening of the action, in want of ready money, just as he was when the payment of the bond was rigidly exacted *on demand*, or *at sight* ; but on both occasions

he had credit to any amount he might require. Shylock did not scruple to advance him three thousand ducats on his *single security*; and ere his trial he had at his command

. 'six thousand ducats to deface the bond ;
Double six thousand, and then treble that.'

ACT III. Sc. 2.

“ How then is it possible that a bond whose expiration must have been so long foreseen as the suppositious one at three months, and enforced by such a rigorous penalty, could have been suffered to expire by a man having such resources, such securities, such credit, and such friends, as Antonio had? Nothing but surprise, sudden, unexpected, and rigorously taken advantage of, could have reduced him to a state of forfeiture; and nothing could have reduced him to such a surprise, except the fact that the bond to which he had set his seal was *unconditionally payable on demand or at sight*. Shylock knew this well; he knew, from the transaction of the previous day, Antonio's want of ‘money or commodity to raise a *present* sum;’ and, payment not being forthcoming on the instant, he seized with rapacity the advantage which the law allowed him, and insisted on the penalty. This is the plain account of the matter. It reconciles the *apparent* with the *real* time of the drama; and it shall be presently made to appear why the poet resorted to this artifice for ostensibly protracting the duration of the action.

“ The *interval during which the bond expires* being thus limited to the *corresponding interval between Bassanio's*

embarkation and his arrival at Belmont, namely, from *nine o'clock* in the afternoon of the first day, and *eight o'clock* in the forenoon of the following, we ascertain with precision the whole duration of the dramatic time of the action. Thus:

	HOURS.
For the first period,	10
For the second period,	18
For the interval between both, . . .	11
<hr/>	
Total duration,	39

“It is not to be denied, however, that many scenes, incidents, and *habitudes*, in the progress of the play, suggest to the imagination of the spectator a greater extension of time than that which is really displayed to his senses. But these apparent retardations of the action are merely illusory, and are effected by contrivances which, on being examined, are found to be purely artificial, and perfectly reconcilable with that series of dates which give the true and visible time of the dramatic action. Amongst the more remarkable of those *protractive* contrivances is the suppositious period through which the bond has to run. We forget that there are two bonds spoken of, and that the one is surreptitiously substituted for the other; one bearing date at three months,—‘three thousand ducats for three months,’—a phrase iterated and re-iterated until it has taken entire possession of the imagination; and another to which no date whatever is assigned, beyond the vague suggestion of ‘such a day.’ The substitution of one for the other

takes place in 'a merry sport,' which makes the chief party concerned, and consequently the spectators, indifferent and inattentive to this part of the transaction; and we hear no more of either bond until the forfeiture. It is plain that in this case the poet—for his purpose—has taken advantage of the first impression on the mind of the spectator; and that the spectator, unconscious of the trick, remains under the delusion, until his reason compels him to reconcile the apparent discrepancy between the suppositious period of the bond and its actual expiration.

“Another of those protractive expedients occurs in the several scenes at Belmont, interposed between parts of the main action previous to Bassanio's successful venture on the caskets. To those scenes there are two considerations which give an air of considerable lapses of time, viz.: first, the vague idea of the distance between Belmont and Venice, suggested by the necessity of a sea voyage, ere yet we have learned the real distance between the places, and from this we catch the notion of a corresponding remoteness in time; and secondly, the number of suitors whom Portia has to be freed from, ere the good fortune of Bassanio can come to its trial. But those difficulties vanish on examination, and it becomes evident that those scenes occupy no more time than the intervals between the parts of the main action carried on by Bassanio and his friends. As soon, for instance, as we know that Belmont is but ten miles distant from Venice, the imaginary remoteness of time as well as place vanishes; we can easily discern how the second

scene of the first Act,—that between Portia and Nerissa, discussing the merits of the several suitors,—occupies the interval only between the first and the third scene of the same Act, namely, the time employed by Bassanio in discovering a money-lender. Then for the disposal of Portia's suitors. It is true she has many to be freed from. There is the Neapolitan Prince; the County Palatine; the French Lord, Mons. Le Bon; Faulconbridge, the young Baron of England; the Scottish Lord, his neighbour; the young German, the Duke of Saxony's brother; the Prince of Morocco; and the Prince of Arragon. But 'they come like shadows, so depart;' 'while we shut the gate upon one wooer,' says Portia, 'another knocks at the door.' (Act I. Sc. 2). Unwilling to risk the conditions, six of them have already determined to 'return to their homes, and to trouble the lady no more with their suit.' (*Ibid.*) Of the two who remain to try their fortune, the Prince of Morocco, who arrives at Belmont some hours before Bassanio leaves Venice, on the first day of the action, makes no longer delay than to dine with the lady, repair to the temple to be sworn to the conditions, to make an unhappy choice among the caskets, and be forthwith despatched:

'Cold, indeed; and labour lost:

Then, farewell heat; and welcome frost.

Portia, adieu! I have too grieved a heart

To take a tedious leave.'

ACT II. SC. 7.

“And finally, the Prince of Arragon's dismissal takes place in Act II. Sc. 9, and at some hour between the em-

barkation of Bassanio at Venice and his arrival at Belmont, apparently a short time only before the latter event. The whole adventure is rapidly transacted:

‘NERISSA. *Quick, quick*, I pray thee, draw the curtain straight;
The Prince of Arragon hath ta’en his oath,
And comes to his election *presently*.

(*Enter ARRAGON, his train; PORTIA, with her’s, &c.*)’

“He proceeds forthwith to ‘unlock his fortunes,’ loses the prize, and bids adieu; and ere Portia has left the scene the arrival of Bassanio is announced. It is certain, therefore, that, whatever air of protraction the bustle and variety of those scenes may give, they all, in reality, take place in the corresponding intervals between parts of the main action, without in the slightest degree really retarding its progress.

“Another of those delusive expedients will be found in the scene (Act III. Sc. 1) between Shylock and Tubal. If we take this scene *au pied de la lettre*, we shall imagine that Tubal has been to Genoa and back again, between the elopement of Jessica and this interview with her father.

‘SHYLOCK. How now, Tubal, what news from Genoa? hast thou found my daughter?’

TUBAL. I often *came* where I did hear of her, but *cannot* find her.’

It is plain, from this equivocal answer, and the various reports which follow, that, with the malice ascribed to him and all his race in this play,* Tubal is through-

* “See in the preceding speech of Salarino: ‘(*Enter TUBAL*). Here comes another of the tribe; a third cannot be matched, unless the devil himself turn Jew.’”

out playing on the irritated feelings and passions of his countryman. He has been in Genoa, indeed, and is just returned from it; but it does not appear that he went thither in quest of Shylock's daughter. Nor does Shylock's address to him, however artfully worded, necessarily imply any such purpose. It consists of two distinct questions; the first touching his mission to Genoa, which was probably mercantile,—‘What news from Genoa?’—the second touching that which was uppermost in the speaker's mind, the flight of his daughter with his ducats,—‘Hast thou found my daughter;’ as much as to say, ‘Perhaps you don't come to speak to me, in my present troubles, about business; but you may have heard something of my daughter, and are come to impart it.’ Tubal's answer is indirect: he says nothing of Genoa, but admits that he had often came where he heard of Jessica (*perhaps* in Venice since his return), but without being able to find her; and he continues, throughout the succeeding dialogue, to rub and irritate the twofold passion under which the mind of his *friend* was labouring; now tickling him with the misfortunes of Antonio, and now goading him with the extravagance of his daughter. In pursuance of this *good-natured* project, he designedly confounds the two topics of Shylock's inquiry; and, when pressed upon one point, dexterously rides off upon the other. Thus, in the following masterly passage, when Shylock, dwelling upon his daughter's ill-conduct, complains that ‘there is no ill luck stirring, but what lights on his shoulders;

no sighs, but of his breathing; no tears, but of his shedding,' Tubal observes:

'Yes, other men have ill luck too. Antonio, as I heard in Genoa,—

SHYLOCK. What, what, what? ill luck, ill luck?

TUBAL,—hath an argosy cast away, coming from Tripolis.

SHYLOCK. I thank God, I thank God:—Is it true? is it true?

TUBAL. I spoke with some of the sailors that escaped the wreck.

SHYLOCK. I thank thee, good Tubal: good news, good news: ha! ha!

—Where? in Genoa?

TUBAL. Your daughter spent in Genoa, as I heard, one night, fourscore ducats!

SHYLOCK. Thou stick'st a dagger in me:—I shall never see my gold again: Fourscore ducats at a sitting! fourscore ducats!

TUBAL. There came divers of Antonio's creditors in my company to Venice, that swear he cannot choose but break.

SHYLOCK. I'm glad of it; I'll plague him; I'll torture him: I'm glad of it.

TUBAL. One of them showed me a ring, that he had of your daughter for a monkey.

SHYLOCK. Out upon her! Thou torturest me, Tubal: it was my turquoise;

TUBAL. But Antonio is certainly undone.

SHYLOCK. Nay, that's true, that's very true: Go, Tubal, fee me an officer, bespeak him a fortnight before. I will have the heart of him,'

“From all this we perceive, as clearly as we see the malice and revengefulness of Shylock, the extreme maliciousness and cruelty of Tubal's disposition, and may fairly infer that, to indulge his humour at his friend's expense, he would not scruple to strain a point. He is a manifest liar. He reports the loss of one of An-

tonio's argosies, and confirms his statement by averring that he had it from 'some sailors that escaped the wreck.' Good evidence this, and out of the mouths of many witnesses. But we know (at the last) that Antonio has sustained no loss at all,—no wreck,—and that Tubal's story is a falsehood invented for the nonce. 'Sweet lady,' quoth Antonio to Portia,—

' Sweet lady, you have given me life, and living ;
For here I read *for certain*, that my ships
Are safely come to road.'

ACT V. SC. last.

" Again, if by his speech, as given in all the editions, Tubal means to say that Jessica had 'spent in Genoa, as he heard, one night, fourscore ducats,' we know also that he must be a liar; for Jessica was not at Genoa at all. In fact she had not reached many miles from Venice, when, between that city and Belmont, she and her lover were overtaken by Salerio, who was hastening to acquaint Bassanio with the news of Antonio's misfortunes, and persuaded to accompany him thither; thus:

' LORENZO. For my part, my lord,
My purpose was not to have seen you here ;
But meeting with Salerio by the way,
He did entreat me, past all saying nay,
To come with him along.

SALERIO. I did, my Lord,
And I have reason for it.'

" The fugitives, therefore, had not been to Genoa, and consequently they were either foully belied by Tubal;

or his speech—which I rather suspect to be the case—is very grossly misprinted.

“This speech is given as quoted above, in all the editions. A slight change, however,—not in the words nor even in the letters, but merely in the pointing,—would restore it to consistency with the real state of the facts, without at all abating of its malice. He has been just telling of what he heard in *Genoa* :

‘TUBAL. Antonio,—as I heard in *Genoa*,—hath an argosy cast away.

I spoke with some of the sailors that escaped the wreck.

SHYLOCK. I thank thee, good Tubal : good news, good news : ha !

ha !—where ?—in *Genoa* ?’

That is to say, ‘Where did you hear this good news?—was it in *Genoa*?’ Tubal, however, is too intent on his malicious purpose to give a direct reply, but, bursting into a scandalous tale of his friend’s daughter, interpolates, by parenthesis, his answer to the Jew’s question. The passage should probably be printed thus :

‘SHYLOCK. where ?—in *Genoa* ?

TUBAL. Your daughter spent—(in *Genoa*),—as I *heard*, one night, fourscore ducats.’

Such interruptions and suspensions in the midst of a sentence,—in order to answer, ere one forgets, or is led away from the subject,—a question—are not unusual in conversation ; the dialogue of Ben Jonson abounds with them, nor is that of Shakespeare destitute of examples. They are very natural, and, if not distinctly marked by the due inflection of the voice, may mislead the hearers :

still more likely would they be, if not with equal distinctness marked in the manuscript, to mislead the printers. I think this must have been the case in this instance, otherwise the anxious inquiry of the Jew respecting the whereabouts of Tubal's well-attested narrative will remain without an answer, and his statement must be taken as a wilful untruth. There is nothing, therefore, in this scene which necessarily impedes the more rapid action which we have already traced; for I suppose that the greedy burst of malice with which *Shylock* instructs Tubal to 'bespeak him an officer a *fort-night* before,' will suggest nothing more than the extreme impatience of the cruel creditor to glut his revengeful animosity with the utmost certainty and with the shortest delay.

"Another suspension of time seems to be suggested by a short speech of Jessica's, immediately after her arrival at Belmont, and while the party there are discussing the intelligence of Antonio's forfeiture. Salerio observes of Shylock, that

. 'none can drive him from the envious plea
Of forfeiture, of justice, and his bond.'

ACT III. SC. 2.

And Jessica subjoins:

'When I was with him, I have heard him swear
To Tubal, and to Chus, his countrymen,
That he would rather have Antonio's flesh
Than twenty times the value of the sum
That he did owe him.'

Ibid.

This language at first sight seems to apply that Shy-

lock was in the habit of expressing himself thus to his family and friends at home; and doubtless so he was. We know of his long-standing enmity against Antonio; but we must beware of thinking that those expressions had immediate reference to the transaction going on between them. That Jessica was speaking of her father's *habit* is clear from this, that since the day on which the bond was contracted she has *never been at home*, never been with him, so as to overhear any of his conversation with his countrymen on the subject. In fact she has had but a single interview with him between the sealing of the bond and her own elopement; and, having ourselves been ear and eye witnesses to that interview, we know that no such conversation took place between her father and his countrymen on that occasion. We must, therefore, understand her as speaking of conversations and transactions *prior to the bond*, and her speech to be nothing more than evidence of the *general and habitual* hatred of the Christian merchant which her father was wont to express, '*while she was with him*,' i. e. before she eloped or the bond existed. Nor is her expression of 'twenty times the sum,' &c., to be taken for more than a common mode of indicating an indefinite amount. The whole passage, therefore, presents no obstacle to the rapid current of action whose real progress we have already ascertained.

"There remains but one more note of retardation to be considered, and it is easily disposed of. Shortly after his arrest, Antonio, weighed down with his calamities, observes :

‘ These griefs and losses have so ’bated me,
That I shall hardly spare a pound of flesh
To-morrow to my bloody creditor.’

ACT III. Sc. 2.

“ By this expression it would, at first sight, appear that the forfeiture, the arrest, the trial, and the execution of sentence, did not, or were not intended to succeed in such rapid succession as we have already assigned. But this is the miscalculation of the merchant, not of the poet. Antonio may have expected that he would not have been brought to trial *until* ‘ to-morrow;’ or he may have hoped that the *execution* would have been held over till the ‘ morrow:’ and the passage shows nothing more than the natural tenacity with which a man clings to the slenderest hope of a prolonged existence.

“ It is not to be doubted, however, that, for reasons to be now developed, it was the poet’s intention that those procrastinating scenes and sentences should give to his action the appearance of occupying a longer extension of time than that in which it is dramatically transacted. He knew that the drama, being an imitation, a similitude of nature, is not nature itself, but a copy, whose excellence depends on the amount of illusion with which the poet can invest it. He knew, therefore, that *dramatic* time is not *natural* time; that the former consists not of the *arbitrary* segment assigned it by the laws of the Greek or the French schools,—whether that be co-equal with the performance on the stage, or with a

period of twelve hours, or with a single revolution of the sun,—but of that period during which the spectator may be supposed capable of watching, without any interruption, or interval of sleep, the progress of an action sufficiently interesting to keep his attention alive and fixed.” * * * * *

* * * * *

I believe I need not, and I know I cannot at the present, add anything to what I have already said. Upon such a system as I have now set forth, I assert all, with certain specified exceptions, the genuine tragedies and comedies of Shakespeare to have been written, and that the laws herein propounded are, in a great degree, if not invariably, applicable to even his historical plays. I assert also my belief that by these laws the genuineness of all the plays ascribed to him may be tested, and proved or disproved, according as this system pervades their structure or otherwise.

If such a method were to be found in this, or in another instance only, it might be considered the result of an unconsidered and hap-hazardous style of composition. But if we find it to be the prevailing, invariable, and, as it were, *constitutional habit* of a long series of works (thirty at least in number) more or less distinctly characterized by it, and issuing from the same intellectual mint, we are reduced to the moral necessity of receiving it as the result of a *regulated system*—of an *established law*. I have in private traced its operations

throughout the greater portion of Shakespeare's dramatic works; and I pledge myself, if health and time be spared me, to carry my investigations quite through, and to be ready, should the public require it, to communicate to the world the results of my investigations through the Press.

The exceptions spoken of are what may be properly called his CHORUS Plays, which, constructed upon a *different* principle, common to him with several dramatic poets of his time, such as Heywood, Chapman, Jonson, &c., do not come within his methods, and yet are not exempt from traces of them.

And now, Sir, permit me, in concluding this hasty communication, to assure you of the high respect with which I have ever regarded the Magazine which you conduct, and the undiminished admiration in which I hold the talents of the venerable Christopher North, or the person for whomsoever that *sobriquet stat nominis umbra*. And, expecting nothing but candour and fair play at your hands,

I have the honour to be,

Most respectfully,

Your obedient Servant,

NICHOLAS JOHN HALPIN.

14, Seville-place, Dublin.

APPENDIX.

(A.)

“ Dublin, November 12, 1849.

“ THE Rev. N. J. Halpin procured a copy of Blackwood’s Magazine for the present November (409th Number), on the 10th inst.; and I have every reason to believe that he then met with the account of Christopher North’s discovery of the Shakespeare Unities for the first time. On the following day he put into my hands for immediate publication the manuscript entitled “ The Time Analysis of the Merchant of Venice,” with directions that it should be printed without addition to, or alteration of, the original fragment.

“ GEORGE SMITH.”

(B.)

“ DUBLIN, 5, LOWER GLOUCESTER-STREET,

“ November 17, 1849.

“ MY DEAR HALPIN.—I perfectly remember your having, some ten or twelve years ago, and frequently in the interval, mentioned to me what you conceived to be the law by which *Time* is regulated in the Shakespearian drama, and which law, you told me, was so strictly observed by Shakespeare, and by him alone of the dramatists of his age, that to your mind, you said, it would be a test to determine, in any disputed case, whether a play was rightly ascribed to him or not. While I quite remember your stating this to me, and your illustrating

it by an examination of the Merchant of Venice, I must also acknowledge that, thinking the determination of such a proposition depended on an examination of minute details, I was rather a listener to your theory than one feeling that he was in the position to give or to withhold his assent. To my own mind, the illusion, through the whole of such a play as the Merchant of Venice or Macbeth, is so little disturbed by what may be shown to be the improbabilities or impossibilities, of either story, that I do not feel any interruption of enjoyment from causes of this kind. This I suppose to be the case with most readers, perhaps with most spectators of the plays. Your object, as I understand you, is to exhibit by what artifices the great poet succeeds in producing this effect, and prolonging the illusion, in spite of the impossibilities or improbabilities of the story with which he has to deal. The inquiry is one of the highest interest, and I am exceedingly glad of any accident that has the good effect of causing you to publish your views on the subject.

"I am, my dear Halpin,

"Your's faithfully,

"JOHN ANSTER.

"To the Rev. N. J. Halpin,

"Seville-place."

(C.)

"9, UPPER GLOUCESTER-ST., DUBLIN,

"November 11, 1849.

"MY DEAR MR. HALPIN,—I perfectly recollect your having apprized me, prior to the year 1844, that you had discovered, in the construction of Shakespeare's plays, a peculiar law of time, consistent with the continuous performance of each play, without violating any of the proprieties of time, notwithstanding the occurrence of long supposed intervals between the incidents. I suggested to you, when you first mentioned your discovery, that you should illustrate the title of your essay on the subject, which I understood you were then preparing, with a dial-plate, as indicating the nature of the investigation. I have

very often, since then, urged you to make your discovery public, and you have always expressed your settled intention of doing so, whenever time would permit you to perfect the illustration of the rule by a complete analysis of all the plays.

“ I am, my dear Mr. Halpin,

“ Very truly your’s,

“ SAMUEL FERGUSON.

“ *The Rev. Nicholas J. Halpin,*

“ *Seville-place.*”

(D.)

“ 21, GREAT CHARLES-STREET, DUBLIN,

“ November 17, 1849.

“ MY DEAR MR. HALPIN,—I have the most distinct recollection of your having imparted to me your discovery—as you stated it to be—of the dramatic laws with respect to the unities which govern the drama of Shakespeare, and that I was greatly struck with the deep thoughtfulness of your theory, and its applicability, in many respects, to the principles of my own art. That Shakespeare had done for *time* that which the painters had done for *distance*, namely, thrown it into *perspective*, appeared to me a conception and an achievement worthy of so capacious an intellect as his; and I felicitated you then, and do now, on your being, as I conceive, the first and original discoverer of so profound a *mystery*.

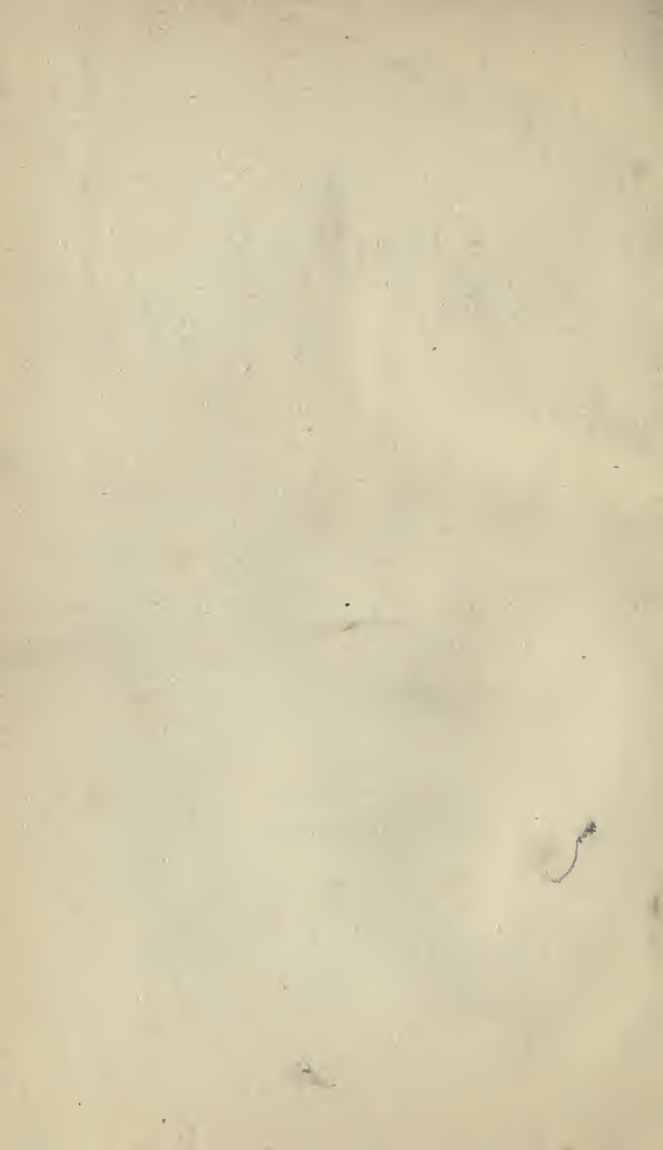
“ Though I cannot speak with perfect certainty as to the exact year in which you first interested me by your communication, I have a positive conviction that it could not have been less than eight or nine years ago; and, in the interim, you and I have frequently discussed the subject again at our social meetings.

“ Believe me ever, my dear Sir,

“ Most respectfully and truly your’s,

“ GEORGE PETRIE.

“ *To the Rev. N. J. Halpin.*”



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